

AN ADDRESS

GIVEN AT CROYDON,

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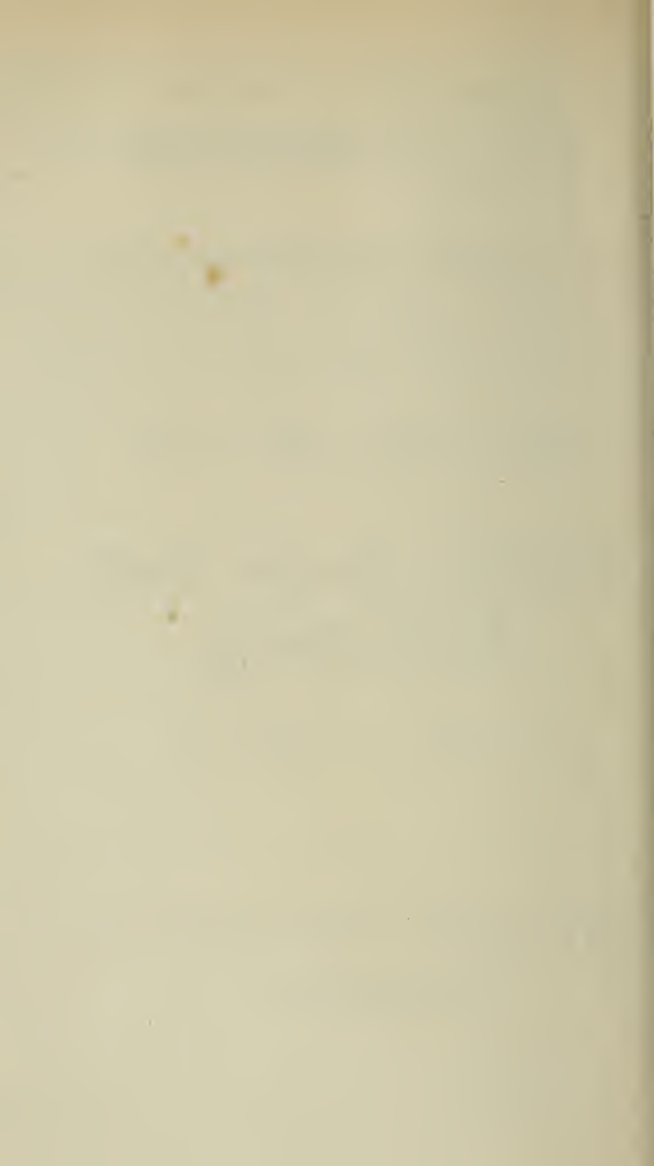
MEETING OF THE

Canterbury Diocesan Church
Reading Society,

ON MONDAY, NOV. 28th, 1887,

BY

THE LORD ARCHBISHOP OF
CANTERBURY.



CANTERBURY DIOCESAN

Church Reading Society.

The meeting held to promote the objects of this Society, marked the commencement in Croydon of one of the most important organizations of the present day in connection with the Church of England, an organization which has for its main object the removal of that reproach, which has been levelled against so many Churchmen, that they are unable to give a reason for the faith that is in them. A Society of this nature properly supported, and efficiently conducted, should be one of the strongest bulwarks of Church defence, a bulwark of constantly increasing strength, which will be the most effective barrier against the attacks of the enemies of the Church.

After addresses had been given by the Rev. J. H. Carr, Professor J. M. Fuller, and W. A. Stone, Esq.,

His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury said there had been such able speeches, so full, so clear, so distinctly stating honest motives for desiring to know more of this great subject, and there had been put before them so simple a programme of the means by which anyone who can find even a little leisure could inform himself upon it systematically, that there was little left for him to say. But he would en-

deavour shortly to sum up what he thought he should have himself gathered that evening if he had known little or nothing of the subject and the means which it is proposed to use to make it better known. Well, he certainly should have felt this. As a matter of common sense it was his duty to understand any great institution to which he belonged, in which he believed, and which he felt at all disposed to defend against attacks, and he thought he could not state their love for their Church in drier and blanker terms than that. If that were all he felt he should still say that, considering what is said of this great Institution to which he belonged, it was his duty to understand it. But when he had a certainty that it was the greatest Society in the world, that it was the greatest Religious Society, that it touched the very depth of his own being, touched his life, his conduct, his faith in the present, his hope of the future, that he had learnt all he knew about these things from it, and when he put his trust in its teaching because he could see that it livingly represents the teaching of his Lord and Saviour, then he felt that it was not enough to speak of it as more or less a duty to understand it, but that he should be bitterly to blame if he did not understand it. But Englishmen, English Churchmen, did not understand their Church as they should. They had gone on so quietly for so many years, taking its existence as a law of nature, feeling and yet not feeling its quiet, gentle pressure upon life, manners, and conversation, that when it is attacked they suddenly found out—and this might be one of the greatest benefits which proceeds from the attack, which undoubtedly has a place in God's providence—that they had no right to belong to an Institution such as this, and yet not to know more about it than we do. Well, next he was sure that he should carry away from what he had heard this evening, a penetrating, an overwhelming sense of the great interest which

would attach to such knowledge. He should feel that a little period such as Professor Fuller touched upon did really contain some of the most interesting, penetrating, should he say exciting knowledge of human nature in its grandest forms that he could anywhere find. And he should come presently to feel that the attacks which had been made upon their Church could not have been made if their people had possessed the knowledge which he now felt it his duty to obtain, knowledge which he felt would bring with it so much interest. Mr. Stone had spoken of the general idea of what the Church of England was, and he wished that he had pursued a little farther the line upon which he had entered. The common place idea of the Church of England was probably what he had described; and to it they might add, as Professor Fuller had said, that there was a further common impression that the property of the Church was taken away from a certain body of religionists called Roman Catholics, who were allowed to shift for themselves, while their possessions were handed over to another sort of people who were called Protestants. Now, if they would enter with clear minds, and a determination to understand what they were about upon the history of the Church of England, they would know that the Reformation was no such sudden scene or act at all, that it was the culmination of a very long period of struggle. They would know there had been a time when this country was free from the yoke of a foreign body, until slowly and insidiously the strong, cold, bony hand closed on the neck of the English people or Church. And they would know that the English people had never been content. As they turned over page after page of chronicles they felt that the whole nation, from the highest to the lowest, from its rulers to the lowest of the people, was always chafing with indignation, quivering, and determined to throw off this unsupportable yoke as it came down closer and

heavier. And as they studied the facts more closely still, they would see how in many of their Cathedrals a vast proportion of the stalls were filled with Italians; they would see men like Robert Grosseteste refusing to institute a Pope's nephew, yet in another century, in that same Cathedral of Lincoln, they would find eight cardinals and seventeen foreigners mostly Italians in actual possession of stalls, besides several with foreign names. So also they would see* how their livings were held by aliens, their revenues and their consciences alike pinched by foreign pressure, and new superstitions poured in apace; how, in all directions, the bondage came upon the English people. But the English Church never gave up the struggle. Then they would come to one of the most prominent points in all history; the years just before what they called their Reformation, when men of the greatest ability and knowledge were searching the greatest questions of doctrine and history,—for they would find that their Latimer and their Cranmer were accomplished “schoolmen,” as they were called, steeped in the old learning—when they went forth, and without stint and without fear, poured upon the ears of the English nation the knowledge they had acquired, and when the whole nation, and its greatest and most thoughtful leaders, determined that they would have the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Then, as they went on with their studies, they would understand that there was no body of people called Roman Catholics, and no body of people called Protestants. There was a whole Church, unchanged in its constituents, protesting against what was properly called Romanism. They would look into their lists, and they would find that from point to point of the Reformation there was scarce a change in the *personnel* at all. They would see the Deans remaining in the Cathedrals, the Canons in their

* Bishop Beke's Register 1343, published by Precentor Venables, *Archæological Journal*, vol. xlii.

stalls; and when certain of the Monasteries were made into Cathedrals, the Abbots became Deans, the Monks Canons, the Rectors and the Vicars, as much as the parishioners, remaining in their parishes. They would see that there was no taking away possessions, but that a whole nation, with one heart and soul, so completely followed the great teaching that out of 15,000 clergy there were not 400 who did not retain their places and pursue their teaching. When they had ascertained this for themselves they would see what became of the claims of these who in the present day are, forsooth, sending an Italian Mission amongst us to try to bring back this great nation or Church (call it which you will) to the old bondage which we had broken.

There was another great question of a different kind at the present day. They found people questioning whether Christianity had really made so great a change as was attributed to it, whether or not civilisation and the mere progress of the human race had not ameliorated things. They might be helped to read and see for themselves the truth about great facts like these. For example, the greatest of great plagues that ever devastated the earth, was a plague that for 20 years of the third century after Christ raged up and down the civilized world, beginning in Ethiopia, devastating Africa, Asia, and Europe, returning again and again to the greatest cities, and spreading such ruin, that it was said that in a single day it killed 5,000 in the city of Rome, and 5,000 in Constantinople. They would see how that while first it saved the Roman Empire, by devastating the barbarians, it ultimately gave up the Romans to the barbarians by almost annihilating the Roman armies. And when they had seen that, they asked themselves what the boasted, advancing Roman civilisation did in the face of this great evil. They would read

awful accounts of how the nearest relatives threw their dead and dying into the streets; how morals, instead of becoming improved by this descending scourge, grew worse and worse, until people began to fear the extinction of morals altogether. Then they would see how the Emperors drove about the city, earning golden opinions by burying the dead, not as a sanitary measure, but as a religious action; how there went up from the Roman temples, sacrifices to all the many gods; how the mints poured forth medals and coins dedicated to health, to the Apollo of Health, the Diana of Health, and how the Christians were being put to death because they would not join in the sacrifices. Then they would read how Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, organized his band of Priests, Deacons, and Laymen, and how they went from house to house, taking all the humane measures which Christian love and nothing else suggested; taking up the wretched people who had been thrown into the streets, entering houses in which people had been left alone to die, tending them tenderly, and then dying themselves by scores and by hundreds from the pestilence. They would see how the clergy of Alexandria were swept off by the contagion, and they would see that the Christians made no distinction whatsoever between Christians and heathen, and that they showed exactly the same attention to the worshippers of other gods, and to their own destroyers, as to their most devoted followers; and then they would ask themselves whether the progress which the world had made was an advance simply of its own civilisation, or whether or not it was the effect of the Cross and of discipleship to Christ. It had been most rightly said by the Bishop of Durham, that Church History was an excellent cordial for drooping courage, and so it was; and it was something more, it was a most excellent answer to nine-tenths of the most subtle objections that were poured out against the Church and against their Christian faith. He was glad to

hear Professor Fuller say that Croydon itself suggested the study of the English Church. The broken monuments even now in the Parish Church, the monuments of the Archbishops rent by the fire, were a silent warning, and a silent stimulus to their pride; one of these monuments, Archbishop Whitgift's, whose buildings and foundations were still the pride of the town, and the strength of their education, he was very glad to see they were meaning to restore. Yes, Croydon, which was given to the Archbishops of Canterbury by William the Conqueror; Croydon, which had been in every age the residence of the chief officer of the English Church, and touched English History at so many points; Croydon, whose memorials on every side testified that whatever was going on in the Church of England, Croydon was to the fore, from William the Conqueror up till our own days. When he considered how Croydon had responded that evening by that crowded gathering, and when the Clergy had, every one of them, seconded the efforts of this Society, he thought that the Church Reading Society had a function before it here. He had been through the prospectus and seen some of the examination papers (not questions only, but answers too), and as an old schoolmaster and an old examiner of many years, he was perfectly satisfied that they were proceeding on the right course. If they followed the lines marked out they would find the knowledge of Church History to be acquired was plain and thorough. The study of Church History would make even the dry details of daily practice interesting, because it makes for these details themselves a place in the great history which was working itself out. They had been told that they were preparing a history of the future; they were doing more than that, they were making history now. By the study of the past they would see how problems as hard as ours, and harder than ours are overcome. What wonderful faith and courage this would give

them! They would see that the old problems were but the problems of the present day, old foes, as Charles Kingsley used to say, with new faces, and they would find as they went on, that the working out of this great mass of problems was the continuation simply of the Acts of the Apostles, which ended without an ending to the last chapter, because the remaining chapters of Church History had yet to be added; nay, they would see in the successive ages of the Church new problems ever emerging, ever receiving their illumination from the reflection of the glory of Him, Who not only was, but is, and is to come.

THE CANTERBURY DIOCESAN CHURCH READING SOCIETY was formed in 1886, to assist those who are reading the subjects suggested each year by the Diocesan Board of Education, in Holy Scripture, the Prayer Book, and Church History, in a course of continuous and systematic study. Among the advantages offered to members of the Society are these:—

- i. Admission to all Lectures and Examinations.
- ii. The right to “Occasional Papers” on the subjects of the year; Examination Questions for private use; and correspondence with the Lecturers and others who are willing to receive communications.

Members are required to read at least one of the three subjects in the Syllabus, and to pay an annual subscription.

THE OBJECTS WHICH THE SOCIETY HAS IN VIEW are : (i.) to promote a continuous course of reading and study as distinct from mere desultory reading, and attendance at occasional lectures; (ii.) to instil the idea that the best results of thought, reading, and study, are to be obtained, not at School or College, but in after life;

(iii.) to remind those whose attention has not already been called to the subjects, that it is hardly ever too late to begin ; (iv.) to insist on the extreme importance of more regular, careful, and intelligent study of the Bible, Prayer Book, and Church History ; (v.) to create fresh opportunities for those who are eminently qualified, or who may qualify themselves, by experience, study, and intellectual endowments, to assist others in the pursuit of similar studies to those which they have found profitable and pleasant for themselves.

Upwards of 600 members have joined the Society. Any information required will be given by the Rev. James H. Carr, Adisham Rectory, Wingham.



